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SUBJECT: ROMANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AT MID-YEAR: THE CALM
BEFORE THE NEXT STORM

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Classified By: A/DCM Bryan Dalton for 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: President Basescu is back in charge with a new, stronger presidential mandate, and he has reasserted himself into almost all aspects of day-to-day foreign policy formulation. Consequently, Prime Minister Tariceanu and his new cabinet have been marginalized by Basescu on key foreign affairs and security matters, a marginalization accelerated by the lack of leadership depth in key ministries. An inexperienced Foreign Minister gets poor marks across the board, including from Tariceanu himself. Defense Minister Melescanu--who has the most experience among Tariceanu's ministers--has also been gaffe-prone, but has recently walked back his remarks in time to manage what appeared to be signs of growing unhappiness among the uniformed services and professional bureaucrats at the MOD. However, the political turmoil surrounding the suspension and return of President Basescu may have, ironically, strengthened the domestic consensus on a shared foreign policy vision. All mainstream parties now seem to have accepted the need for a clear firewall between the domestic and international audiences. Russia's harsh rhetoric on CFE and other issues has also contributed to strengthening that consensus in Bucharest. After initial hiccups in the first half of 2007, the way ahead is as clear now as it had been on the road to NATO and EU memberships: maintain the firewall, recognize President Basescu's primacy over foreign and national security policy; and prepare for growing Romanian assertiveness in critical national security areas like the Black Sea, Kosovo and the Western Balkans, and on Middle East/energy security matters. End Summary.

12. (C) President Basescu returned to office May 19 with a decisive three-quarters majority vote rejecting his removal from office. Basescu's return heralded a weakening of the domestic forces that had aligned themselves against him. Prime Minister Tariceanu's April purge of pro-Basescu cabinet ministers was followed by the installation of a considerably weaker national security team. Tariceanu now is saddled with an inexperienced Foreign Minister who is pilloried regularly in the press and a gaffe-prone Defense Minister who has had to reverse himself on a number of issues including on Romania's overseas military commitments, the stationing of US military forces in Romania, and the prospects of joint exercises with Russia. However, the overall consensus in the three mainstream political parties (PNL, PD, and the PSD) on the broad outlines of Romania's foreign policy has been Romania's saving grace. This consensus includes, inter alia: a focus on stability on the eastern and western borders; deepening Romania's relationships within multinational institutions; and energy security. However, with all

political actors positioning themselves for the upcoming European Parliamentary elections (and four more back-to-back elections ending with a Presidential election in the winter of 2009), there will remain enormous temptations for rival politicians to toy with sacrificing political continuity in the hopes of achieving a short-term political gain, similar to last summer's flap over PM Tariceanu's abrupt call to withdraw all Romanian forces from Iraq. The challenge for us will be to continue to stress the need for Romanian leaders to strengthen the firewall between heated political discourse and our bilateral and trans-atlantic equities.

13. (C) Having now achieved its quest for EU and NATO entry, the GOR must now grapple with the devil in the details, whether it be in making NATO-rational defense procurement decisions or bringing Romanian taxation policy in line with EU interests. Meanwhile there are hints that the learning curve for a more mature conduct of foreign policy may be beginning to flatten. The GOR foreign policy agenda seems to have settled on five basic themes: (1) focus on immediate national security interests including stability on the eastern (e.g., "Greater" Black Sea Policy) and western borders (Balkan/Serbian integration into Euro-Atlantic structures); (2) broaden and deepen relationships within multinational institutions including staking out Romania's "space" in the UN, OSCE, NATO and EU; (3) greater concentration on economic development, including in energy security and enhancing relations in the Middle East, especially Iran; (4) a new out-reach to Latin America and Asia. (5) Relations with Moldova remain a special case and does not fit neatly in Romania's foreign policy agenda because of national and cultural baggage.

Dysfunctionality

14. (C) Between February and April 2007, and with the imminent prospect of suspending President Basescu, Prime

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Minister Tariceanu declared that he would begin reorienting Romania's foreign policy eastward, arguing for "more balance" in the relationship with the EU versus the more transatlanticist instincts of President Basescu. The Liberal-Democrat DA Alliance that led Bucharest into the EU was replaced with Tariceanu's "ultra-minority" government (encompassing roughly 22% of parliament) in April 2007. The new cabinet, by then purged of Basescu's Democratic Party (PD) allies, also had replaced several key experienced Liberal Party ministers, including those in the defense, justice, interior and foreign affairs ministries. This changed the composition and character of the Supreme National Defense Council, the deciding body for all important foreign policy and national security issues.

15. (C) Tariceanu's removal of Foreign Minister Ungureanu in February under the pretext of a scandal involving Romanian contract workers arrested in Baghdad for taking pictures inside a coalition facility in Iraq was seen as a first major step at cleaning house of those seen as too close to Basescu (and inadvertently too close to the U.S.). The MFA saw several reassignments of officials over the next few weeks which negatively affected our closest contacts. The list of qualified and experienced officials within the government became increasingly shallow, leaving few strong candidates to fill important positions including the ambassadorships to the U.S. and the UK. When Foreign Minister Ungureanu was replaced by the inexperienced Cioroianu--over Basescu's objections--Cioroianu's missteps underscored his status as a novice. In the wake of Cioroianu's famously mediocre engagements with his European counterparts, an obsession with his media image, and his now infamous micromanagement tendencies within the Foreign Ministry, even the Prime Minister has admitted privately that he made a mistake nominating Cioroianu to office.

¶6. (C) Another major personnel change was replacing the U.S.-friendly Defense Minister Sorin Frunzaverde with the less predictable Theodor Melescanu. Melescanu, a former foreign minister, is the only "seasoned" professional in the group of new Liberal ministers, but since his April appointment he has contributed his share to the Tariceanu government's public gaffes. In the short time that he has been in office, Melescanu has recommended legislation that placed a troop cap on the presence of US forces for Joint Task Force-East both outside the parameters of our Defense Cooperation Agreement and without consultation with the U.S. Melescanu also has walked back the GOR from approving F-16s to replace Romania's aging MiG-21 fleet, in what many Romanian national security experts here (including one former defense minister and two experts in academia) see as a blatant attempt to increase the chances of more lucrative offers from European-based aerospace industries like Gripen and Eurofighter. The Defense Minister recently put the Dassault Rafale on the table during the last (June) CSAT meeting, catching everyone by surprise on an issue that already had been studied for two years. It is generally assumed within the uniformed services that Melescanu will recommend the Gripen over the CHOD's and President Basescu's stated preference to lease F-16s on the path to purchasing the JSF.

¶7. (C) When MFA officials were asked if they had comments about Defense Minister Melescanu's off-hand suggestion that Romania, Bulgaria and Russia conduct joint military exercises in the Black Sea within the PfP framework, they consistently argued that Melescanu more than any other official in the GOR is an experienced diplomat who knows what he is doing. Within Melescanu's own PNL party, our contacts insisted that he has a reason for everything that he does. However, the following day the front pages of several newspapers ran stories of Russia's extremely negative reaction to the Melescanu offer, including an acerbic comment by Russia's senior Defense advisor General Samanov comparing the Melescanu comment to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. While Melescanu has softened his rhetoric about scaling back Romania's international military commitments in Iraq, he continued to raise eyebrows at the June NATO Defense Ministerial when it appeared Romania was walking away from the Alliance's long-standing position on Kosovo. Again, Melescanu corrected Romania's position at the last minute to join the consensus, but still left an aftertaste for Allies to ponder about Romania's reliability.

Consensus

¶8. (C) Despite the various dysfunctional aspects of the government--some of it is institutional and some rooted in

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personalities--there remains a deep consensus across party lines on Romania's strategic interests; foremost of which is the U.S.-Romanian partnership. Even though there have been occasional missteps and misstatements, there remains enormous continuity and consistency in Romanian foreign and security policy decisions at the end of the day. Romania always seems to find its way back to the fold. Nevertheless, we cannot always assume that some common views held by the USG and Romania (especially on NATO/EU frontier issues, multinational institutions, and economic development) reflect shared interests. The decade-old strategic partnership between the U.S. and Romania (since President Clinton's 1997 visit to Bucharest following the NATO Summit in Madrid) is strong, even if there is room for more maturity in the relationship. There are few countries willing to go the extra mile to work with us, which Romania will do provided they do not perceive that their immediate interests are being taken for granted. In the larger context of trying to assert Romania's interests when they diverge somewhat either within NATO, the EU or even with the U.S., the GOR (and especially President Basescu) wants to make sure those allies and partners must not assume

everything or take Romania for granted. The GOR has its own interests to promote; fortunately those interests tend to be consonant with ours even if they are for different reasons. But as evidenced by the Kosovo issue, Romania's are not always identical to our own.

¶9. (C) One impediment to consistency in Romanian policymaking is the lack of a clearcut national security strategy. The last version from 2006 is more sermon than strategy. Our MFA contacts who contributed to the draft described a process through which the interagency turned the strategy into a "Christmas Tree" with every ornament any government agency and ministry could hang on it. The final product was then wholly rewritten in a rambling style (even in Romanian) that made the strategy essentially unintelligible. As a result, there is no framework document to keep the sundry foreign affairs actors from wandering off a task. Some issues, like Romanian deployments to Iraq, have national importance but are not fixed within a strategic context and are easily overshadowed by the internecine conflicts among the political leaders--again raising questions about Romania's reliability.

¶10. (C) Recognizing some of the problems Romania has with the partners' and allies' shaky confidence in Romania's consistency, Cioroianu announced on July 11 that he intends to present a 10-year foreign policy strategy in September. Though Cioroianu has initiated an MFA "Consultative Council" made up of former heads of state and foreign ministers (including, among others, former presidents Illiescu and Constantinescu, and former foreign ministers Geoana and Ungureanu), we do not expect the results to differ much from the current general consensus on the GOR's strategic interests. The results, in fact, will likely parallel the process that developed the last national security strategy; that is to be all things for all people. This situation is unlikely to change until the political dynamics between the President and the government does, and this will not occur until there are new parliamentary elections to rebalance the relationship between the President, government, legislators and the voters.

¶11. (C) Meanwhile, a resurgent President Basescu is again presiding as Commander-in-Chief over the 12-member Supreme Council for National Defense (CSAT). The first CSAT meeting following Basescu's return reaffirmed on June 28 that Romania would maintain its international commitments, including its troop numbers in Iraq and Afghanistan. That decision thus ended any debate over whether Romania would drawdown from Iraq, an issue that Tariceanu kept trying to force since spring 2006. It goes to show that--domestic politics aside--Romania continues to be a faithful partner in the Global War on Terrorism. In fact, the Prime Minister may have learned his lesson--not to challenge the most popular political figure in Romania--and we expect that the Prime Minister will now work to build upon the path that President Basescu set out in the first place, at least until the next opportunity to gain a domestic political advantage comes available.

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